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Maggie wins the Fany award

One of the highlights of the Prime Minister's visit to the United States later this month, apart of course from allowing President Reagan to have an audience with her, will be the presentation to her of the Donovan Prize, a little-known award of which Mrs Thatcher will be the first woman recipient.

The prize is named after a certain General "Wild Bill" Donovan, a First World War American hero who led the fighting Irish of New York. In the Second World War Donovan rose to be head of the Office of Strategic Services, the Americans' principal intelligence and black propaganda outfit.

Donovan died in 1959, and a body known as the "Veterans of the OSS" established the award in his memory, to be presented to suitable candidates who embodied the general's love of freedom and democracy.

The lovers of freedom and democracy who have had this honour bestowed upon them in the past have not all been remarkable for their left-wing, or even middle of the road, views. They include Allen Dulles, the onetime head of the CIA, Earl Mountbatten, the moon astronauts Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin, David Bruce, the former US ambassador in London, and Jacques Chaban-Delmas, the Gaullist president of the French National Assembly.

Geoffrey Jones, president of the Veterans of the OSS, told my colleague Michael Leppman in New York yesterday that they thought it appropriate the award should go to a woman this time, not least because during the war the OSS had worked closely with a women's branch of the British Service, which he recalled being known as Fany.

"Mrs Thatcher embodies the fighting spirit, courage and willingness to take risks to achieve goals, as the general did," said Jones.

"And anyway, we're sort of running out of old dogs who were with us in the service."